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**And the Flint Stone became a Rabbit...  
The Creation of the South and the Origin of Time  
in the Aztec “Legend of the Suns”**

Among the different elements that compose what has been called “cultural memory”, the memory of the very beginning is probably one of the most important items.

Carved in stone, painted in pictographic books, theatrically performed in rituals, contained in choreographic sets of movements or verbally expressed, the creation (or expansion) of the world has been a major mythological matter in Nahuatl pre-Columbian culture. The semantic ambiguity of the English word “matter”, which can be either a diffuse raw material or a specific formal subject, helps to express the inchoative character of a cosmogony that emerges from a mythological magma and takes shape until it reaches its formal equilibrium.

Among many other mythological texts, the so-called “Legend of the suns” is perhaps the most important one about the Nahua conception of world creation and nahua origin. It forms part of a sixteenth century manuscript written in Nahuatl by a native but using the European script and today known as the *Codice Chimalpopoca* (1982). In the following the analysis will be based on the original manuscript. The text provides signs, symbols, rhythms and more generally a metaphorical narrative structure that matches the deep infraliminal concern of Nahua collectivities about the beginning of the world and constitutes a matter for memory.

We do not intend to do here an exhaustive study of this particular version of the myth. We only wish to point out some specific aspects of its narrative that could help understand Nahua mechanisms of production of a “mytho-logical” meaning and the importance of cosmogonic sagas in the construction of cultural memory.

Before we consider the myth in itself, we will try to characterize the text according to the particular circumstances of what seems to have been the reading of a pictographic indigenous document and see what might have been the consequences of that fact at narrative level.

## 1. The text

A careful analysis of the speech in this text shows that it is most probably the reading of an annotated pictorial native document. The text can be divided into four parts according to speech characteristics:

1. An introduction of what is to be said (paratextual).
2. A systematic reading of calendar signs, numbers, and pictorial action corresponding to the four ages.
3. A retrospective look at the last age (4 Water) and the reading of a pictorial narrative sequence, which was intentionally omitted in the second part of the reading.
4. A series of diverse information concerning dates, chronology of events and time, not semantically subordinated, which show the general look of an informer who is providing “precisions” and seems to be hesitating. This fourth part is to be considered as metatextual since it concerns more the instance of reading than the story itself.

### 1.1 The introduction

*In nican ca tlamachilliztlàtolçaçanilli ye huecauh mochiuh inic mamanca tlalli, çeçentetl in itlamamanca. Inic peuh in çan iuh macho iniquin tzintic in izquitetl in omanca tonatiuh chiquacentzonxihuitl ipan macuilpohuaxihuitl ipan matlacxihuitl omei axcan ipam mayo, ic 22 ilhuitica de 1558 años.*<sup>1</sup>

Here is the knowledge tale that was made long ago about how the earth extended itself. One by one were its extensions. It began, as it is known, when each one of the *Suns to be*<sup>2</sup> extended, there are 2513 years today, on May 22<sup>nd</sup> 1558.

### 1.2 The systematic reading of signs and events

*Inin tonatiuh nahui ocelotl ocatca – 676 años. Inique in izçepan onoca ocelloqualloque ipan nahui oçellotl in tonatiuh. Auh in quiquaya chicome malinalli in itonacayouh catca. Auh inic nenque centzonxihuitl ipan matlacpohualxihuitl ipan yepohual xihuitl ypan ye no caxtolxihuitl oze. Auh inic tequanqualloque matlacxihuitl ipan ye xihuitl inic popoliuhque inic tlamito. Auh iquac polliuh in tonatiuh. Auh in inxiuh catca çe acatl. Auh inic peuhque in qualloque in cemilhuiltonalli nahui oçelotl, çan no ye inic tlamito inic popoliuhque –.*

This sun was 4 Jaguar – 676 years. Those who were there in this first (age), were eaten by jaguars in the time of the sun 4 Jaguar. And what they ate was 7 Twisted grass, which was their food.

And they lived 676 years.

1 *Códice Chimalpopoca*, fol. 75-76; translation from Nahuatl to English by Patrick Johansson.

2 *Tonatiuh* is in fact, as we will see it, a verbal expression with the meaning “there will be light (and heat)”.

And when they were eaten by wild beasts it lasted thirteen years, so were they destroyed, so were they finished off.

Then the sun was destroyed. And their year was 1 Reed.

And when they began to be eaten, it was on a day sign 4 Jaguar, so did (everything) come to an end, so were they destroyed.

*Inin tonatiuh nauhecatl ytoca. Iniquein inic oppa onoca yecatocoque ipan nauhecatl into-natiuh catca. Auh inic polliuhque yecatocoque, oçomatin mocuepque in incal in inquauh mochecatococ, auh inic tonatiuh çan no yecatococ. Auh in quiquaya matlactlomome co-huatl, in intonacayouh catca. Auh inic nenca. Caxtolpohualxihuitl ipan yepohualxihuitl ye no ipan nahui xihuitl inic popolliuhque çan çemilhuatl in ecatoque. Nauhecatl ipan çemilhuatonalli inic polliuhque. Auh in inxiuh catca çe tecpatl.*

The name of this sun is 4 Wind. Those, who were there for the second [time] were blown away by the wind in the time of the sun 4 Wind.

And when they were destroyed and blown away, they turned into monkeys. Their houses and trees all were all blown away. And this sun also was blown away.

And what they ate was 12 Snake, which was their food.

It was 364 years that they lived, and in only one day were they destroyed, blown away by the wind, they were destroyed on a day sign 4 Wind. And their year was 1 Flint stone.

*Inin tonatiuh nahui quiyahuitl. Inic ei inic etlamantli nenca nahui quiyahuitl in tonatiuh ipan. Auh inic polliuhque tlequiahuilloque totolme mocuepque. Auh no tlatlac in tonatiuh moch tlatlac in incal. Auh inic nenca caxtolpohualxihuitl ipan matlaxihuitl omome. Auh inic popolliuhque ça(n) çemilhuatl in tlequiyauh. Auh in quiquaya chicome tecpatl in intonacayouh catca. Auh in inxiuh çe tecpatl auh içemilhuatonalli nahui quiahuitl inic polliuhque pipiltin catca yeica in axcan ic monotza cocone pipilpipil.*

This sun is 4 Rain. Those who lived in the third one, in the time of the sun 4 Rain. And the way they were destroyed is that they were rained on by fire. They turned into turkeys. And the sun also burned. All their houses burned.

And it was 312 years that they lived. But when they were destroyed, it rained fire for only one day.

And they ate 7 Flint stone, which was their food. And their year was 1 Flint stone. And it was during this day sign 4 Rain. And when they died they were children. Therefore today the children speak so: pipilpipil.

*Inin tonatiuh nahui atl itoca. Auh inic manca atl ompohuaxihuitl on matlactli omome. Iniquei in ic nauhtlamantinenca ipan nahui atl in tonatiuh catca, auh inic nenca centzon-xihuitl ipan matlacpohualxihuitl ipan epohualxihuitl ye no ipan caxtol xihuitl oçe. Auh inic popoliuhque apachiuhque mocuepque mimichtin. Hualpachiuh in ilhuicatl ça çemilhuatl in polliuhque. Auh in quiquaya nahui xochitl in intonacayouh catca. Auh in inxiuh catca çe calli auh içemilhuatonalli nahui atl inic polliuhque, moch polliuh in tepetl auh inic manca atl ompohualxihuitl on matlactli omome. Auh inic tzonquiça in inxiuh.*

This sun is named 4 Water. And the water extended for fifty-two years. Those who lived in the fourth one, it was in the time of the sun 4 Water. And they lived 676 years. And they died by drowning. They turned into fish.

The sky came falling down. They were destroyed in only one day.

And they ate 4 Flower which was their food.

And their year was 1 House. And it was on a day sign 4 Water that they were destroyed. All the mountains disappeared. And the water lay for fifty-two years. So finished off their years.

### 1.3 The narrative sequence

*Nima(n) ye quinahuatia in titlahuan in (i)toca Nata, auh in içihuah itoca Nene. Quimilhui: maca oc tla xictlaçotlaca(n) xiccayonican in çenca huei in ahuehuatl. Auh ompa ancallaquizque iniquac in toçoztli in huahualpachihuiz in ilhuicatl, auh oncan callacque. Niman ye quinpepechoa. Quimilhui çan çentetl in ticcuaz in tlaolli no çentetl in mocihuah. Auh in oquitlamique oxalquizque onca ca ye huactiuh yn atl aocmo molinia in quahuatl niman ye mo (fol. 76) tlapoa niman ye quitta in michin niman ye tlequauhtlaça auh niman ye quimoxquia in mimichtin, nima(n) ye huallachia in teteo in çiltallinicue in çitlallatonac quitoque: teteoye. Aquin ye tlatlatia aquin ye quipochehua in ilhuicatl.*

*Auh niman ic hualtemoc in titlacahuan in tezcatlipoca niman ye quimahua qui(mi)lhui: tle tai tataye? tle amai? niman quimonquequehcoton intzintlan quimontlatlallili in intzontecan ic chi(chi)me mocuepque.*

Then Titlacahuan ordered the one whose name (was) Tata, and his wife, whose name (was) Nene. He told them: now well take the branches off a big cypress and hollow it out. And you will get inside when it's Tozoztli, when the sky comes falling down, and so they got inside. Then he shut them in, he said to them "you will eat only one of these corn kernels, also your wife: only one". When they had finished (to eat) them, they went aground on the sand.

The water is drying. The log is not moving anymore. Then it opens. Then they see a fish. Then they drill fire and then they roast fish.

Then the gods Citlalinicue, Citlalatona come to see; they said, "oh Gods, who's burning something? Who's smoking the sky?"

And then Titlacahuan, Tezcatlipoca, came down then he scolds them. He said to them, "What are you doing, Tata? What are you doing?"

Then he cut off their heads and stuck them on their rumps, so they turned into dogs.

### 1.4 The complementary information

*Auh inic pocheuh in ilhuicatl omacatl xihuitl. Izcatqui i(n)ye tehuantin inic ye tonoque inic huetz in tlequahuatl. Inic moman in ilhuicatl çe tochtli xihuitl. Izcatqui ini(c) huetz tlequahuatl icuac nez in tletl. Auh inic tlayohuatimanca cempohualxihuitl ipan macuilxihuitl. Auh inic moman in ilhuicatl çe tochtli xihuitl auh in omoman auh iman ye quipochehua in chichime in yuh omito in nipa. Auh ca zatepan in huetz in tlequahuatl in tlequauhtlaz in tezcatlipoca in ye nocce(p)pa ic quipocheuh in ilhuicatl ipan xihuitl omacatl.*

And when the sky was smoked (it was) in a year 2 Reed. Here is how we (men) exist, when the fire drill fell.

When the sky was established was in a year 1 Rabbit. Here is how the fire drill fell, when fire appeared.

And, it was dark for twenty-five years. And it was in the year 1 Rabbit that the sky expanded. And when it had expanded, then, the dogs smoke it, as mentioned above. And after the fire drill had fallen (after) Tezcatlipoca had drilled fire – he also smoked the sky once more, in a year 2 Reed.

## 2. The reading of a pictorial book

Several aspects of the speech suggest that the text of *Anales de Cuauhtitlan* and especially the part here considered, called by Del Paso y Troncoso “The Legend of the suns”, are the reading of a pictorial book. Some errors in the order of the phrases and the reading of a pictorial book. Some errors in the order of the phrases and the fact that some pictorial schemes were reproduced in the alphabetic transcription (Fig. 1) show that an image, probably annotated, was being read (Johansson 2004: 48-49).

Figure 1: Leyenda de los Soles in *Códice Chimalpopoca*, fol. 40 v, (78)



### 2.1 The deixis

In the part of the text here considered we observe:

- Many deictic expressions such as *Nican ca* “Here is”; *Izcatqui* “There is...”; *Inin tonatiuh*... “This sun...”; *Nipa* “over there”.
- A verbal hinge: *auh*, at the beginning of many sentences, seems to correspond to the successive reading of different glyphs.
- An indication referring the duration of the first era 676 years, written first with Arabic ciphers and then in Nahuatl with letters.
- Different metatextual information concerning not only what is being said but also what is being observed on a pictorial book.
- The fact that the phrase: *Inic moman in ilhuicatl ce tochtli xihuitl* “when the skies expanded (was) in the year 1 Rabbit” appears twice in the text suggests that someone transcribed alphabetic glosses that were lying close to a picture.
- The verbal aspect of the information concerning the dates 1 Rabbit and 2 Reed, in the last part of the text, reveals a look at a picture as well as a hesitation about the attribution of such dates to specific narrative actions: the expansion of the sky and the drilling of the fire by Tezcatlipoca.

### 2.2 The introduction

The deixis contained in the introduction could correspond either to an oral instance of speech act or to the reading of a pictorial text. It sums up the different stages of the creation of the World and provides a numeric indication in relation to the very day of the narration by the informer May 22nd 1558. This indication: 2513 years could have been deduced from the reading of numeric signs on a pictorial document, according to a date which was being read. There are two possibilities:

1. The date read on the book refers to the beginning of the process of creation (the first era), which would correspond to the year 955 BC (2513-1558) and we have to add 2028 ( $676 \times 3$ ) to that number in order to have the date corresponding to the invention of fire (2 Reed). This date would be 1073 AD for the expansion of the skies and the creation of fire. The date from which this lapse of time was deduced would be 1 *Acatl* (1 Reed).
2. The date 995 BC refers to the result of the process and corresponds to 2 Reed (or 1 Rabbit). In this case the date corresponding to the beginning of the process (the first era) would be 3023 BC.

This period, however, doesn't seem to match any number and could have been a wrong reading of numeric signs or an omission in the reading of some of these signs. We know that the informers of the *Codex Vaticanus A* or *Vaticanus-Rios* (because of

fray Pedro de los Ríos handwriting) did sometimes a wrong reading of a series of numeric signs.

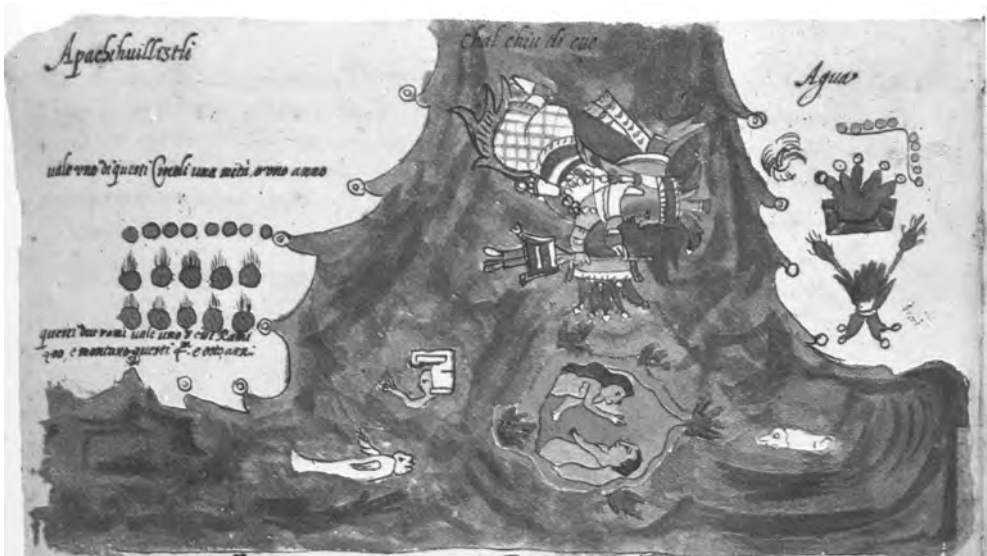
### 2.3 The “systematic” reading of signs and action

The pattern of expression of the second part of the text shows a regularity, which corresponds to the systematic reading of a picture rather than the enunciation of a memorized information.

- This sun ...calendar name.
- What happened.
- What they ate.
- How long the era lasted.
- What time the destruction lasted.
- What the year of the era was.

The few variations in the order tend to confirm it was a reading of pictographic signs. In the third era “what they ate” comes after that period. In the fourth, the time of destruction is repeated, showing more the sweeping look at a picture by an informer than the typical order of orality. The four eras depicted in *Códice Vaticano A* are examples of what could have been the pictorial text being read (Fig. 2).

**Figure 2: *Códice Vaticano A*, plate V.**



### 2.4 *The narrative sequence*

After providing the sign information of each era, the informer comes back to the last one, which probably shows the cypress tree with Tata and Nene inside. The sight of Tata and Nene and other pictographic representations probably triggered the oral tale of what happened.

### 2.5 *Complementary information*

The fourth part of the text is clearly metatextual. The informer looks at year signs and actions pictorially represented, and precises or completes the information.

Probably looking at the glyph of a date or a series of years, the informer declares that the world remained in darkness for the twenty five years that is to say until 13 *Acatl* (13 Reed) when the sun and the moon were born. The years 1 Rabbit and 2 Reed are respectively attributed to the expansion of the sky and its smoking. There seems to have been, however, confusion in the interpretation of the latter. According to the story, there are two different smokings of the sky: the first provoked by the roasting of the fish which determines the expansion of the sky (1 Rabbit). The other realized by Tezcatlipoca with the *tlequahuatl* which marks the beginning of time (2 Reed). The informer seems to have placed both smoking sequences at the same date: 2 Reed. The drilling of fire by Tezcatlipoca with the instruments (*tlecuahuatl/mamalhuaztli*) is extremely important in the mythological structure of the myth. It is curious that the informer did not include it in the narrative part of his reading of the pictures.

## 3. **An intricate network of symbols**

As in most mythological narratives, a dense network of symbols and action produces (rather than refers) meaning. We will simply enumerate here some of the most important ones for the analysis we are realizing subsequently. Let's emphasize however that in a mythological context of the creation of space and time, the different calendars and the cardino-temporal implication of numbers, year signs, day signs *trecenas*, calendar names, etc., offer a structure that will give a meaning to the actions that take place within that structure. For example, we know that the year sign for the south is *Tochtli* and, on the other hand, that two identical year signs can't co-exist in the same cardinal region.

### – The elements

The four elements *earth*, *air*, *fire* and *water* respectively associated to the first, second, third and fourth eras are essential parts in the production of meaning.



– The animals

As for the elements, a specific animal is associated to each era: The *jaguar* for the earth, the *monkey* for the air, the *turkey* for the fire, the *fish* for the water and ultimately two *dogs* for the movement.

– The maize

The formation of the world is also the gestation of what would be the food and the body of man: *maize*. The different types of wild maize are referred through their calendar names: 7 *Malinalli* (twisted grass), 12 *Coatl* (snake), 7 *Tecpatl* (flint stone) and 4 *Xochitl* (flower). If we compare this version with the pictographic version of *Codex Vaticanus A* and *Teogonia's* version, 7 *Malinalli* could be *ahuatomatl* “oak’s acorn”; 12 *Coatl tzincoacoc* or *cincocopi*, a “fruit”; 7 *Tecpatl ococentli* a pine kernel and 4 *Xochitl acicintli* a seed which grows in water. The gods would give Tata and Nene a kernel of *tlaolli* each, before the cultivated maize: 7 *Coatl* (chicome coatl), and 7 Snake, would later eventually be discovered by Quetzalcoatl in the Tonacatepetl.

– The 4 year signs of the *xiuhpohualli*

The four year signs are vinculated to a cardinal region of the world to be created: *Acatl* (Reed) represents the *East*, *Tecpatl* (Flint stone) stands for the *North*, *Calli* (House) represents the *West* and *Tochtli* (Rabbit) refers the *South*. Combined with a series of numeric exponents from 1 to 13, these signs constituted the *Xiuhpohualli* “the count of the years”. It is interesting to observe that each sign seems to be associated with a physical aspect of nature: animal (rabbit), vegetal (reed), mineral (flint) human (house).

– The 20 signs of the month (*cempoallapohualli*)

The month was composed of twenty signs whose archetypical position and value were defined by the first month: 1 *Cipactli* (crocodile), 2 *Ehecatl* (wind), 2 *Calli* (house), 4 *Cuetzpalin* (lizard), 5 *Coatl* (snake), 6 *Miquiztli* (death), 7 *Mazatl* (deer), 8 *Tochtli* (rabbit), 9 *Atl* (water), 10 *Itzcuintli* (dog), 11 *Ozomatli* (monkey), 12 *Malinalli* (twisted grass), 13 *Acatl* (reed), 14 *Ocelotl* (jaguar), 15 *Cuauhtli* (eagle), 16 *Cozcacuauhtli* (vulture), 17 *Ollin* (movement), 18 *Tecpatl* (flint knife), 19 *Quiahuitl* (rain), 20 *Xochitl* (flower). In certain contexts, a number expressing an archetypical position in a month could implicitly refer a sign. For example, 7 could be associated with the deer or 17 with the movement.

– The thirteen days of the *tonalpohualli*

The twenty signs of the month were combined with numbers from 1 to 13 in 20 series of thirteen days (*trecenas*). These series were producing meaning through different combinations with specific values which were interpreted by the *tlapouhqui* (reader of signs) and constituted also nexus of meaning in a mythological web. As we will see,

the four year signs were probably produced by four series of thirteen days. The calendar names of the suns are to be considered within their corresponding series of thirteen days.

– The months (*metztli*)

Each group of twenty days constituted a month whose name recalled mythological actions circumscribed within these twenty days and ritually performed during the month. In the text here considered the months *Tozoztli* (the Vigil) and *Toxcatl* (dry thing) are directly concerned.

– The numbers

As in most mythological contexts, numbers have here a specific meaning. Number 1 expresses the beginning, 2: duality, the tetralogical 4: earth and fire, 5: space in temporal movement (that is to say the world as a whole), 13 the accomplishment of a process, etc. The archetypical month (the first, beginning with 1 *Cipactli* and ending, twenty days later, with 7 *Xochitl*) determines the value of each number in some specific contexts.

– The duration of the suns

The duration of the suns 676 years ( $13 \times 52$ ), 364 years ( $7 \times 52$ ), 312 years ( $6 \times 52$ ), and 676 years ( $13 \times 52$ ) are in fact multiples of number 52 (a cycle). The first and the last have to be considered as stable and complete. The second ( $7 \times 52$ ) and the third ( $6 \times 52$ ) are instable, incomplete by themselves and have to be considered as “complementary” ( $7 + 6 = 13$ ).

#### 4. The instability of the era 4 Wind

The name given to each era: *tonatiuh* “sun” reveals its inchoative character. This term was originally (and still is) a verb composed of a radical *tona* “there is light (or/and heat)” and a morpheme of directional extroversion *-tiuh* in future. The expression means “there will be light (or/and heat)”, since the grammatical particle *-tiuh* can express, indifferently, a progress in time or (and) space. In fact, none of the four eras mentioned in the first part of the myth will become viable until the future comes through the expansion of the sky, the creation of the South (zenith) and the beginning of time. The instability can be established in relation with the normativity of vigent structures of the calendars in Nahuatl culture and the corresponding orientation of years, days and periods of 13 days.

– The four different year signs should match their corresponding cardinal directions, that is to say: *Acatl* to the East, *Tecpatl* to the North, *Calli* to the West, and *Tochtli* to the South. Any divergence creates semiological tensions, narratively pertinent.

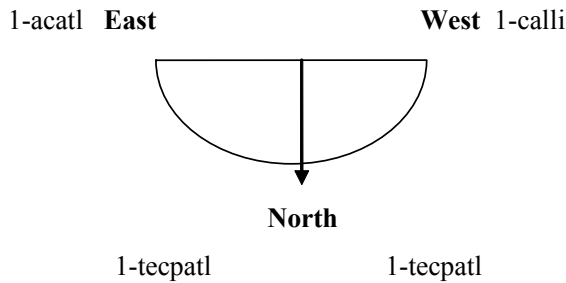
– The calendar names

The calendar names of people, gods or plants probably have an immediate significance. We should not forget, however, that they are also to be considered within a thirteen day- period whose main sign (the first day) determines many aspects in the production of meaning.

– An unfinished world

If we consider the different factors just evoked, and especially the year signs, it is clear that after four eras, the world is unfinished and unstable. The first Sun (earth) firmly establishes the *East (Acatl)*, the last (water) consecrates the *West (Calli)* on a stable equinoctial axis. The second era (wind) and the third (rain of fire) occur both at a date 1 *Tecpatl* (flint stone) which identifies them both with the *North* (Fig. 3):

**Figure 3: The incomplete world according to the year signs and their relation to the cardinal directions**



This unfinished world is not viable for different reasons:

1. Two potentially different eras but, in a “twin-like” situation, are occupying the same region of the world.
2. There is no sky, the air being still “secluded” in a septennial part of the world so constituted.

It is clear that the era which is not in its correct space-time position is 4 Wind.

## 5. The expansion of the sky and the creation of the South

The next sequence will take the era 4 Wind to its place through a narrative mechanism: Nata and Nene, as they cook their fish, produce *smoke*. As a result of the integration of water and fire, the smoke rises upward and thus raises the sky to its place: the South. The expression *quipochehuah in ilhuicatl* means in fact “they elevate the sky with (through) smoke” as well as “they smoke the sky”. This vertical elevation of the axis of smoke unites the newly created *South* to the *North*, the zenith and the nadir



*Nonan ce tochtli aquetztimani  
titzotzotlacatoc, tezcatl in çan  
hualpopocatimani.*

My mother one-Rabbit, who is lying  
down raising up her head,<sup>3</sup> you who are sparkling,  
you, the mirror which is smoking.

Another fact corroborates the link between Citlalinicue or Citlalcueye, the Milky Way, and smoke: tobacco is often called “Citlalcueye’s son (Citlalcueye *ipiltzin*)” (Ruiz de Alarcón 1982: 187).

On the other hand, fire and smoke are respectively referred as “the old man” and “the old woman” in different contexts (Ruiz de Alarcón 1982: 199). And the fact that Citlalinicue was conceived as an old woman helps to associate her with smoke (González Torres 1991: 40). The old goddess Ilamatecuhtli who was sacrificed during the feast *Tititl* was the incarnation of Citlalinicue, but also represented Nene the smoke that became the Milky Way. She was sacrificed and beheaded once the sun had reached its Zenith (*onmotzcalo tonatiuh*). She could possibly represent the white, smoky part of the fire and her being beheaded could correspond to Nene’s decapitation. The smoky aspect of Citlalinicue, Citlalatonac, the Milky Way, would then be the result of the Promethean production of fire and smoke by Nata and Nene in the year 1 Rabbit, zenith (*itzcallo*) of the future course of the sun.

## 7. From North to South; from flint knife to rabbit; death and sex

The elevation of the column of smoke in 1 Rabbit determines a zenithal, cosmological climax as well as separation of entities (rather than the creation) from a petrified unity to a vital duality.

– A flint knife becomes a rabbit.

More than a transmutation from mineral to animal, the relation between one of the flint stones and the rabbit is to be considered as genesic. Let’s just recall the myth in which the flint knife becomes undesirable and then is being thrown down into a cave called Chicomoxtoc (Torquemada 1975-1983, III: 120). The result of the penetration of the flint knife into the cave is the birth of 1,600 gods and goddesses. The symbolism of the flint knife will be dual, according to the context. It will express aridity or phallic genesic power. The metamorphosis of the flint knife into a rabbit is the mythical expression of a change from a petrified inanity to a dynamic sexual activity.

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3 Ruiz de Alarcón’s Spanish text reads “mi madre boca arriba”.

– *Miquiztli* “death” and *mazatl* “deer”.

The two mentioned eras blocked in the northern dimension of an unfinished world, are clearly defined by their space-time attributes. Among these, their specific duration provides clues for an interpretation. The 4 Wind era lasted 364 years and the 4 Rain era 312 years, that is to say, respectively 7 x 52 and 6 x 52 years.

The numeric exponents 7 and 6 are constitutive parts of 13 and are complementary. Now, these ciphers symbolically refer their corresponding signs in the archetypical month of the *tonalpohualli*: *mazatl* (7) and *miquiztli* (6) that is to say sex and death. The era 4 Rain which remains in the North will be Mictlan, while the era 4 Wind raising to the South will determine a sexual apotheosis in *tonatiuh ichan*, where celestial and earthly bodies lay together: *nepantla*.

The “way of the deer and the rabbit” are a well-known Nahuatl metaphor for sexual life. The deer will be an incarnation of the sun which will have to be sacrificed in order to get rain. The rabbit is a numen related to the moon. They now lay together at *nepantla tonatiuh*, in the meridional zenith.

## 8. The creation of the earth, the animals and the sky

Freed from an undesirable flint knife that went up to the South, the north will settle and become the earth in 1 *Tochtli*. Becoming 1 *Tochtli*, and bringing along the deer (7 *Mazatl*), 1 *Tecpatl* will be the calendar reference of the creation of animals. The drilling of fire by Tezcatlipoca in 2 *Acatl* will settle the sky *ilhuicatl* according to the *Codex Telleriano Remensis* on folio 24 recto:

*En dos<sup>4</sup>-cañas fue creado el cielo, y los animales en un-pedernal y la tierra en uno-conejo.*

In two Reed the sky was created, and the animal in one Flint, and the earth in one Rabbit.

This gloss apparently doesn’t seem to correspond to what is painted in the codex but to what the informer knew about the creation of the world. However it fits the cosmogonic context of our myth. Twenty-five years later, with the creation of the sun and the moon, daylight: *ilhuitl* will emerge in the East, from fire within the darkness.

## 9. The domestication of fire and the origin of time

The smoking of the sky, a tenebrous space where the gods lived, a night sky with no other light than the twinkling of the stars provoked the anger of the gods. Tezcatlipoca immediately decapitated both Nata and Nene, stuck their heads on their respective bottoms (rumps) and turned them into dogs.

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4 “One” was substituted to “two” in a correction written in a different hand script.

A mythological scheme of regression seems to appear at this point and an *inversion* takes place which sends back downwards those who had prometeically made a fire and raised the sky up to the stars. The heads on the rumps probably express the regression that what comes up has to get down, that the first will become the last, that the head (sky<sup>5</sup>) will go to the bottom (earth).

– Percussion or friction in doing fire

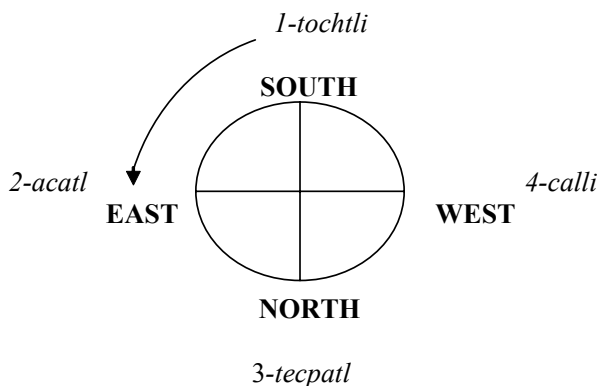
Besides all the symbolic elements already evoked, the presence of two flint stones in the northern part of a still uncreated cosmos could allude to a meaningful opposition between an androgynous (uncivilized) way of making fire through the percussion of two stones and a sexual way to do it by friction when a male phallic wooden stick drills a female wooden receptacle. The words used in the text he considered do not precisely refer percussion but the traditional way of drilling fire. Nevertheless, this could be due to the way the story teller verbally expressed himself regardless of what could have been an important mythological detail.

– Fire and water

The fire obtained by percussion or friction and the water of the deluge produced the smoke, which elevated the sky up to the Zenith. The sticking of the heads of Tata and Nene on their bottoms expresses that what went up as fire would go down as water, that the fire, which goes up, belongs to the sky and the rain which goes down belongs to the earth. As for their becoming dogs, this narrative action establishes probably the psycho pomp character of the dog in the Aztec realm of death. After scolding Nata and Nene, beheading them, sticking their heads on their rumps and turning them into dogs, Tezcatlipoca drilled a fire with the *tlecuahuitl* (fire drilling sticks). This “official” creation of fire by the god (opposed to the promethean action of Nata and Nene) establishes the starting point of time in the year 2 *Acatl* (2 Reed). This beginning of time is consequent to the action already described, and chronologically consecutive to 1 *Tochtli* (1 Rabbit) in the Aztec year calendar (Fig. 5).

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5 The head is metaphorically referred as *ilhuicatl* “the sky” in Nahuatl culture. Cf. *Códice Florentino*, Libro X, capítulo 27.

**Figure 5: The beginning of time in the process of world creation**

- 2 *Acatl* “2 Reed”: the creation of the sky.

The elevation of the smoke up to Citlalinicue opened a vertical dimension to the world in 1 Rabbit. However, this undefined celestial dimension became the sky as such only one year later in 2 Reed, when Tezcatlipoca drilled a fire with the *Tlecuahuitl*, the fire sticks. Going from *Tochtli* to *Acatl* means to go down from South to East and by doing so settle the space occupied by the sky from the East-West equinoctial axis up to the Zenith. On the other hand, to pass from 1 to 2 means to move on an axis of succession that will become “chrono-logical”. There might have been confusion, in Pre-Columbian times on the exact calendar settlement of the “New fire”. Was it the fire drilled by Nata and Nene in 1 Rabbit? Or was it the one drilled “officially” by Tezcatlipoca in 2 Reed.

It is probable that the first year would be 1 Rabbit resulting from the first fire, that consecrates the creation of *Space*, and the earth. 2 Reed, would be the New fire (the official fire) and the first *xiuhmolpilli*, the first binding of the years (from 1 Rabbit to 2 Reed) which would have consecrated the creation of time, and the sky as a cultural dimension of time. A supposed change of New fire ceremony from 1 Rabbit to 2 Reed, might not have been decreed by Motecuhzoma as some investigators have expressed it but could have been a misinterpretation of a mythical narrative.

- *Omacatl* “2 Reed”: a divine incarnation of the mythological event

The creation of the domestic fire by Tezcatlipoca in 2 *Acatl* follows the elevation of the sky up to the zenith in 1 *Tochtli*. Both dates express the extension of the sky.

A manifestation of Tezcatlipoca, *Omacatl* is a Huitznahuatl that is to say a dweller of the south. As the domestic fire he is also the god of feast, invitations and banqueting (*Códice Florentino*, libro I, cap. 15).



The drinking of the best pulque (the new one) called *Huitztli* “spine” or *macuilli* “five” was part of the festivities on the day 2 Reed. They took the image of Omacatl to someone’s house for 200 days *Códice Florentino*, libro IV, cap. 15). On the day 2 Reed the god was “nourished” with the blood of sacrificial victims in his *Tzompantli* (skull rack). This ritual possibly re-enacted the decapitation of Tata and Nene by Tezcatlipoca in the year 2 Reed. An impersonator of Huitznahuatl was also dying on the day 2 Reed, in the temple called Tezcatlachco (*Códice Florentino*, libro II, Apéndice).

– *Huitztlampa* “the region of the spines”: the South

Produced by the elevation of a column of smoke, as a result of the integration of water and fire, the South is also the place where Nata and Nene were decapitated. It is related to auto-sacrifice and sacrifice. Its name probably refers that fact. The first fire made by Tata and Nene in 1 *Tochtli* came from the earth and went to the sky. The second, produced by Tezcatlipoca in 2 *Acatl* came from the sky and fell on the earth for the use of humanity. It is when time began. The South is also the site symbolically corresponding to sexual relation.

## 10. Nata and Nene

Contained in an *ahuehuatl* tree that floated during the 52 years of the deluge Nata and Nene are the ancestors of humanity and respectively telluric fire and smoke (*in huehue*, *in ilama*). By roasting fish in ashes they provoked a smoke that would take the sky up to the Zenith, up to what would become the South. They are respectively the fire and the water of the earth that would become, after their sacrificial decapitation, the fire and the water of the sky.

The *ahuehuatl* (cypress), literally “the old one of the water” whose calendar name is 1 *Atl* (1 Water) after floating horizontally during the deluge would become the vertical axis of the world connecting the North to the South. During 52 years the fire would be in gestation within its wooden matrix. It is from the *ahuehuatl*’s wood that would be made the *tlecuahuatl* (*mamalhuaztli*), the sticks to drill fire.

Nata and Nene represent also the first couple and sexual relation. The instruments to drill fire: the wooden (male) stick and the wooden (female) clog might have been called respectively Nata and Nene. Nata and Nene, after becoming dogs, as psycho pomps, would also guide the dead in the Netherworld. When the tree of fire became the tree of wisdom and knowledge, Nata and Nene would become Cipactonal and Oxomoco, the creators of the calendars and more generally of civilization.

## 11. *Nepantla tonatiuh* “Midday”

The expansion of the sky, the location of the South in the due sky level, determined also the zenith of what would be the cycles of the sun and the moon. It sets also what

is to become *midday* after the sun's creation. Now, it is interesting to analyze, in this specific mythological context, the etymology of the Nahuatl expression for midday: *nepantla tonatiuh*.<sup>6</sup> *Nepantla* comes from the verb *nepanoa* "to confound" or *nepanihu* "to get together". The first can also have sexual connotations when it is used with *te-*. *Enepanoa* means "to have sexual relation with someone". The South, the zenith, and "mid-day" would be, in that case, the place and time where (when) two people lay together and are perhaps "con-founded", mixed. Nata and Nene, fire and water, would be mixed in the smoke (*apoctli*) at the middle of what would soon be the day, and this might explain the presence of a selenic symbol: the rabbit, in a place where the sun seems to predominate. The so-called *Teocalli de la Guerra Sagrada* "Temple of the sacred war" could express this hypothesis (Fig. 6).

**Figure 6: *Teocalli de la Guerra Sagrada* (Arqueologia Mexicana)**



6 *Tlahcotonalli* "half a day" but also "half a sun", *tlahcotonatiuh* "half a sun" are other expressions used for "midday" in ancient Mexico.

The two dates 1 Rabbit and 2 Reed, visible on each side of the stairs, as well the representations on the sides and on the top of the pyramid, refer the myth here considered. Now, the sun shining in the front (upstairs) could hide the “confounded” moon. It is hard to say since the color has disappeared but that is mythologically feasible. *Nepantla tona-tiuh* would then mean “together (or at the same place) they will shine” before being lexically petrified in “Midday”.

## 12. Blood and smoke in the month *Toxcatl*

The text explicitly refers that the sky fell in a month *Tozoztli*, probably *Huey tozoztli* in the *cempohuallapohualli*, the month before *Toxcatl*. Now, according to our analysis there was not such a sky and that is precisely the promethean action of Nata and Nene that elevated the sky from the bottom of the Netherworld up to the Zenith.

If the flood occurred in *Tozoztli* then the smoking of the sky should have taken place in the month *Toxcatl*. The meaning of *Toxcatl* is not very clear. Durán (1967, I: 225) translates it as “dry thing” and which is a cause of drought.

Although the feast *Toxcatl* is extremely complex, it is probably related to the cosmological event we are here considering, and particularly to the creation of fire. The word used to express the roasting of the fish is *quimoxquia*, or *quim(mo)ixquia*, an honorific form of (*qui-ixca*) or *quimixca* “they roast it (or them) in ashes”. The original name of the feast might have been *tlaxquiltl* “roasted in charcoal (*tlaxochtli*) or in hot ashes (*tlaxoquauiltl*). Other names for the feast: *popochtli* and *tepopochhuilztl* show the importance of roasting and smoke in the ritual context of the festivity (Serna 1982: 324).

*Totopochtli* “roasted thing” could also be said *totopochcatl* and the latter could have been abbreviated as *tochcatl* (or *toxcatl*). The picture corresponding to the month *Toxcatl* in *Codex Vaticano A* emphasizes the smoking of the god (Tezcatlipoca), of the temple and everything that stood around (Fig. 7).

On the day 1 *Tecpatl* of the *tonalamatl*, they used to burn tobacco “the son of the Milky Way” in a ceremony which was probably recording the smoking of the sky by Tata and Nene *in illo tempore* (*Códice Florentino*, libro IV, capítulo 21).

*Auh inic quitlatiaia iietl, çan cecemmecatl çan iuh cuitalpitiuh in quitlatiaia, contenteuç iupan, iuhquin puchteotoc, aiahuitl mantoc, aiahuitl quiztoc, iuhquin mômomolocatoc.*

And so did they burn tobacco, in a bundle, they tied them about the end (the tubes of tobacco) with a cord to burn them. They placed it before him (the god). So the smoke is arising, a fog (of smoke) is spreading, a fog is going forth, so it is billowing.

Figure 7: *Códice Vaticano A*, plate LIX

Even though 1 *Tecpatl* is Huitzilopochtli's day sign, it is probable that the god being smoked was Tezcatlipoca and that this particular ritual recorded the production of smoke by Nata and Nene as well as the invention of fire by Tezcatlipoca.

Pulque-makers did special offerings to the fire and to the pyroxene dog(s) in that smoking context (Fig. 8).

During the first days of *Toxcatl*, temples were adorned with flowers (*Códice Vaticano Ríos*, plate LIX, p. 138):

*A los quince días de mayo celebraban la fiesta de Toxcatl y adornaban los templos con muchas clases de flores y rosas, porque en este tiempo vienen las aguas...*

The fifteenth day of May they celebrated the feast of *Toxcatl* and they adorned the temples with many flowers and roses because at this time come the waters...

Figure 8: *Códice Magliabechiano*, lámina 86



On the day 1 *Tecpatl* of the *tonalamatl*, temples were also adorned with flowers (*Códice Florentino*, libro IV, capítulo 21):

*Auh in Motecuçoma in ixquich tlaçoxochitl, in nepapan xochitl, in huelic, in ahuiiac uncan quimana in iolloxochitl, in eloxochitl, in cacaoaxochitl, in izquixochitl, ioan cacaoacincocatzl, in izquican icac, oacalxochitl, in cacalxochitl in xiloxochitl, ioan in ie ixquich nepapan tlaçoxochitl, in tlamanli, in vellalalilli, in tlatecuicuilolli, in nîmati, in chimalxochitl, in ololiuhqui, in momoiaoa, in xexelihui: auh in çaçan tlatlanecutli, iuhquin tlauiiastoc, tlaueuelixtoc, tlauiiastimani, tlaueuelixtimani, in iteupan.*

And Motecuzoma then offered all manner of precious flowers [before the image] – varied flowers which were sweet-smelling and fragrant: magnolia, maize flowers, cacao flowers, popcorn flowers, and garlands of maize ears, which grew everywhere; basket flowers, raven flowers; yellow and blue tobacco flowers; milky corn silk flowers; and all manner of precious flowers, prepared, – well-formed, well-arranged, made as shields of flowers, circular, radiating, and spreading; and the pleasant-smelling ones. It seemed as if the fragrance, the perfume, spread and blanketed his temple.<sup>7</sup>

It is most probable that this particular ceremony would be realized when the *trecena* 1 *Tecpatl* stood within the month *Toxcatl*. Flowers, smoke and pulque; the sense of “smell” is here predominant.

In *Codex Vaticano Rios*, the last age is the age of *Xochiquetzalli* which refers the “raising of flowers” (*xochi-quetza*). The corresponding picture shows people dancing with banners (*pantli*) and flowers in their hands which recalls the flowered death (*xochimiquiztli*), that is to say death in war or in sacrifice. In a red sky circumscribed by garlands of flowers we can see flowered flint knives probably also referring a sacrificial death.

Most of the ritual festivity of *Toxcatl* are related to fire, smoke and probably to the expansion of the sky in the year 1 Rabbit. Now, drought and the general idea of “dryness” (*huacqui*), is certainly present in that context. Nata and Nene, as they cooked their fish, also “burned” the water of the deluge and thus created smoke but also provoked a drought and a subsequent demand of rain.

Due to its extreme semiological density and to the specific circumstances of its transcription to alphabet, a Nahuatl mythological text requires an analysis of speech act previous to any interpretation of narrative sequences. As we saw, the *Legend of the Suns* was undoubtedly read and transcribed from a pictorial book. This fact determined the formal aspect of the text, its narrative structure, and explains a certain confusion in the chronology of events.

Besides, in the specific context of this version of the myth, a calendar network of dates, years signs, thirteen day-periods, numbers, cardinal regions, calendar names, duration, constitute the loom on which meaning is being weaved. Narrative action is taking place within the calendar frame of a well-established cosmology. Any failure to match the system creates semiological tensions which are highly significant in terms of mythological narration.

We tried to demonstrate, in this article, that the expansion of the sky and the creation of the South were ultimately deduced from an “abnormal” repetition of a year sign and the absence of another, as well as produced by the narrative sequence.

Beyond pictorial books, calendar frames and rituals periodically performed, Nahuatl cultural memory was giving a meaning to the stars.

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7 Translation by Dibble and Anderson (1970), book IV, chapter 21.

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